TL 1444-18

STATEMENT TO UN DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE

SESSION ON EAST TIMOR

NEW YORK, 14 AUGUST 1989

BISHOP ALOISIUS NOBUO SOMA

Honorable Chairman and Delegates,

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation for all the endeavors made by this Committee in order to bring about a peaceful settlement to the cause of East Timor. I am here, representing the Japanese Catholic Council for Justice and Peace. One of the deep concerns of our council is East Timor.

I must, however, confess that it was only a few years ago that our council began to realize the grim reality of this suffering people as it is, especially through the visit to Japan of the previous ecclesiastical leader of East Timor, Mgr. Martinho da Costa Lopes. Regrettably, this lack of understanding exists not only in the Church of Japan but in many other Churches all over Asia.

"Why is it?" I asked myself, and then I realized that Indonesia had successfully kept even its neighboring Asian countries totally uninformed about the East Timor devastation.

Regarding the question of getting information on East Timor, our council has great esteem for the Japanese East Timor solidarity groups with whom we form the Free East Timor Japan Coalition. Their fervent activities have always been a source of inspiration to our council, and I owe, to some extent, this opportunity of my attending this Committee, to their humanitarian enthusiasm.

Ever since we became aware of what was happening in East Timor, we tried our best to understand the essence of this tragedy. And in this process it became apparent that this occurence is not simply a war, but it is a clear case of genocide in which no less than one third of the whole population has perished. And our regret for East Timor becomes more profound when we direct our attention to the close commercial partnership between Indonesia and Japan. It is now a known fact that part of Japanese financial aid to Indonesia is spent to oppress the Timorese movement for freedom and peace. We, as Japanese citizens, acutely feel the

need to make reparation for this economic-dominated mentality of Japan.

My desire to take decisive action for East Timor was highly stimulated when I heard from a person who had recently entered East Timor that, even today, the Timorese live in constant fear of the Indonesian military; their right to freedom cannot at all be exercised; they take the situation of East Timor as a state of war and naturally have a strong wish for a cease-fire to be declared. What impressed this person deeply was the complete isolation of the Timorese Church. Not even the major superiors of the religious orders which have their communities in East Timor can obtain sufficient information about the real state of East Timor when they visit it. This is because they are not allowed to move without being under military surveillance.

Actually, it was nothing less than the brave letter of the reverend Bishop Belo that determined me to throw my full support behind this problem of East Timor. This letter was addressed to Mr. Perez de Cuellar, the United Nations Secretary General, last February. The letter was more than enough for me to understand the real aspirations of the Timorese People. I have always thought highly of the leadership of the Timorese Church, and I could not help reading the letter of Bishop Belo with great admiration. I recall the impressive words said by this same Bishop five years ago, and I quote: "I am ready to be removed if that is the price of defending human rights and the rights of the Timorese. The truth should be published."

Honorable Chairman and Delegates, let us heed Bishop Belo's letter. Let us imagine that he is present here in front of us and is talking to us on behalf of all the Timorese. He says: "It is important that East Timor should not be forgotten." This cry reminds me of the duty or mission of us Church members, which is described in the letter of Pope John Paul II titled, "To Build Peace, Respect Minorities." The Pope says: "As members of the one family of God we can tolerate no division or discrimination in our midst... Jesus came that 'all may have life and have it abundantly'

(Jn 10:10). No person, no group is excluded from this mission of unifying love which has now been entrusted to us." Genuine unity is not brought about by force, it is established on the respect for the right to life and the right to freedom. The above-mentioned cry of Bishop Belo reminds me also of the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, which states: "We...determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war... to reaffirm faith in... the equal rights of... nations large and small... to promote social progress and better standards of life in wider freedom." Who on earth can deny that East Timor is one of the nations which is in urgent need of this spirit of the Charter?

Bishop Belo's letter continues: "The people of Timor must be consulted on the future of our land... Until now, the people have not been consulted. Others speak in the name of the people. Indonesia says that the people of East Timor have already chosen integration, but the people of Timor themselves have never said this." This is another call to the United Nations which has the duty and mission to persuade the antagonists to sit together to talk in order to bring peace. Here let me dare to propose immediate action for the dispatch of a United Nations Inquiry Commission to East Timor. I consider that it is high time to adopt drastic measures if we really want peace in East Timor.

The last and main point of the Bishop's letter is:"..to ask the Secretary General to start in Timor the most normal and democratic process of decolonization, i.e., the holding of a referendum." Personally I think it one of the most solemn objectives of the United Nations to decolonize nations under colonial control. East Timor, which is illegally occupied by Indonesia, remains a colony according to International Law. Therefore, if the United Nations does not exert itself to the utmost in order to comply with Bishop Belo's most legitimate claim, and start all the necessary procedures for a referendum to be held, our every hope and expectation towards the United Nations will end up in grave despair. I pray in a very special way that the members of this Committee will be as brave as Bishop Belo in confronting all the imaginable pressures from the so-called big countries.

Honorable Chairman and Delegates, I address the final part of my statement to each of you on behalf of all the Church leaders and members throughout Asia and Oceania who have expressed their deepest anxieties for our sisters and brothers in East Timor. It is indeed with great pleasure that I can present here in support of Bishop Belo's letter more than 1,250 signatures in support of Bishop Belo's letter which I received from the Asia-Oceania Cardinals. Archbishops, Bishops, priests, sisters and many faithful who were so eager to join the Church leaders in expressing solidarity with the Timorese people. Among these signatures there are some from other regions of the world as well. What does this great number of signatures mean? What all these signatures manifest is: EAST TIMOR IS NOT FORGOTTEN. There is a growing concern and commitment for this cause.

Honorable Chairman and Delegates, let me tell you what I heard from a very reliable source. The Indonesian authorities are arresting Timorese Community leaders on suspicion of having signed a statement to support the letter of Bishop Belo to the United Nations Secretary General. With deep sorrow for this type of conduct by the Indonesian Government and a firm belief in the Timorese aspirations for self-determination, I once again plead with you to take into serious consideration what Bishop Belo points out in his letter.

Before concluding my speech, let me convey my sincere appreciation and expectations to my dear Indonesian Church leaders, with some of whom I enjoy close friendship. The Bishops of the Indonesian Catholic Church have been trying in a very difficult situation, to be good partners in faith with those suffering brothers and sisters in East Timor. I hope you too, will continue to increase your solidarity with the Timorese Church.

It is necessary, however, for men and women of all religious beliefs, and most especially, the members of this body, to urge the Indonesian Government to remain faithful to its supreme principles, and find a just solution to the East Timor situation which can be embraced by both the Indonesians and the people of East Timor.

Thank you.

+ Aloisius N. Soma

Aloisius Nobuo Soma, Bishop of Nagoya
August 14,1989

A PRESS RELEASE - IN BRIEF

East Timor in 1989 still remains a colony according to International Law. East Timor is illegally occupied by Indonesia. Military domination, and genocide are realities there, but Indonesia tightly controls any information about this annexed colony. There are, however, groups in Japan that have made diligent attempts to discern the true situation in East Timor. They have been particularly inspired to give active support by Timorese spokesmen who have fearlessly presented their people's option for freedom, self-determination and peace.

One of these spokesmen, Msg. Carlos Belo, 'Bishop of Dili', sent a letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations, February 1989. requesting the immediate process of decolonization in East Timor. Bishop Belo states clearly the views of his people: The Timorese people must be consulted on the future of their land. They want, under the auspices of the U.N., first, that a referendum be held as a process for decolonization, and secondly, that the East Timorese people, themselves, participate in any talks held regarding their future.

Prompted by the courage of this letter, the Japanese Catholic Council for Justice and Peace requested Roman Catholic Church leaders, members and groups to give their names in support of this appeal. More than one thousand responded from Asia, Oceania and other parts of the world. These names will be presented by Msg. Aloisius Soma, Bishop of Nagoya on August 14th to the U.N. Secretary General, and to the Chairman and Delegates of the United Nations Committee on Decolonization.

Bishop Soma will also address the Committee. In his statement the Bishop invites people of all religious beliefs to urge the Indonesian government to remain faithful to its highest principles. He encourages the Indonesian Church to continue in difficult circumstances to stand with their Sister Church of East Timor. Bishop Soma calls upon the U.N. Committee on Decolonization to live up to the United Nations'Charter by immediately starting procedures for a referendum, and to respond to the legitimate desires of the East Timorese people by finding a just solution which can be embraced by both the Indonesians and the people of East Timor.

Translation of the letter by Bishop Belo which was originally written in Portugese.

NO.2.583/UDD/89 Dili, 6 February 1989

His Excellency Sr. Dr. Javier Pérez de Cuellar
Secretary General of the United Nations
New York
USA

Your Excellency,

First allow me to give you my sincere and respectful greetings. I am taking the liberty of writing to your Excellency to draw to your attention the fact that the process of decolonisation of Portugese Timor has still not been resolved by the United Nations, and it is important that this should not be forgotten.

For our part, we, the people of Timor, think that we must be consulted on the future of our land. That is why I am writing, as a leader of the Catholic Church, and as a citizen of Timor, to ask you, as Secretary General, to start in Timor the most normal and democratic process of decolonisation, i.e., the holding of a referendum. The people of Timor must be allowed to express their views on their future through a plebiscite. Hitherto the people have not been consulted. Others speak in the name of the people. Indonesia says that the people of Timor Timur (East Timor:trans) have already chosen integration, but the people of Timor themselves have never said this. Portugal wants to let time solve the problem. And we continue to die as a people and a nation.

You are a democrat and a friend of human rights. Therefore let your Excellency demonstrate with facts your respect for the spirit and letter of the United Nations charter, which grants to all the peoples of this planet the right to choose their own destiny,freely, consciously and responsibly. Your Excellency, there is no more democratic means of ascertaining the supreme desire of the Timorese people that the holding of a referendum promoted by the United Nations for the people of Timor.

Sr Pérez de Cuellar, I thank you for all your sympathy with the people of Timor and conclude by expressing once again my best wishes.

With admiration and respect,

I remain

+ Dom Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo SDB,
Titular Bishop of Lorium
Apostolic Administrator of Dili

Letter to Secretary General Dr. Perez de Cuellar

Dear Sir,

Recently, a letter addressed to Your Excellency by the Bishop of East Timor, Carlos Filipe X. Belo, has been brought to my attention. In the letter Bishop Belo appeals to Your Excellency to have the United Nations conduct a referendum in East Timor to enable the East Timorese people to freely decide their future.

The Catholic Church in East Timor, under it's former leader, Msg. da Costa Lopes, and its present leader, Bishop Belo, has consistently stood by the people in their suffering and shared their aspiration to one day live in freedom and dignity. Bishop Belo's appeal should be seen, not as being motivated by personal or sectarian interests, but as embodying the wishes of the people as a whole.

I fully support Bishop Belo and add my voice to his in urging you to do everything in your power to realize a referendum in East Timor that will allow the Timorese people to freely choose their own fate.

Respectfully yours,

(Signed) _____

Name:

Address:

Number of Signature collected from Bishops	:	114
Priests, Sisters, Lay People	:	1,137
Totle	:	1,251